

*"NOTES"—"HARMONIES"—
"NOCTURNES."*



*H. Wunderlich & Co.,
868 Broadway,
New York.*

March, 1889.

Pleasant, Creditable, Not Astonishing.

This exhibition is not one which demands extended notice. As a whole it is pleasant to see, and a creditable exemplification of the level which American art has reached in this particular medium. But it makes no distinct impression on the memory, marks no epoch of progress or promise, and contains few pictures of which particular descriptions could be written. Contrasting it with our water color exhibitions of some ten years since, we have every reason to be proud of it. Contrasting it with a fancied exhibition such as our local painters might give us if they put forth their full strength, it seems somewhat thin and monotonous, and perhaps a trifle commonplace. Many of the best names are wanting, as, for instance, Mr. La Farge's at one end of the list of varying kinds of art and Mr. Winslow Homer's at the other. And most of the able men who have contributed show essays of a modest, unimpressive, though often very satisfactory sort.

The most noticeable single picture in the collection is Mr. Blum's "Venetian Market," with its gay and brilliant, yet not meretricious clang of hues, in which yellow and orange rule, its admirably characterized figures, its skill in grouping, and the proof it affords that an artist need not be superficial or trivial, no matter how light and airy he may be in mood and treatment. This is certainly one aquarelle which would make its mark in any collection that could be gathered together anywhere in the world. So, too, with the exquisite little river study that Mr. Whistler sends from London. Nothing could be more delicate and subtle, yet it is so keen and fine and personal, that it takes the eye on this crowded wall as a violin note may take the ear amid a blare of brass. On a lower plane than this perfect and individual little picture are Mr. Blum's other contributions, by no means so brilliant as his "Market," yet each of them—they are all Venetian views—has its own share of grace and attractiveness.

Sir: There is a "picture" by James McNeill Whistler at the Water Color Exhibition this year. I say it with bated breath and a feeling of wonder that Mr. Whistler should so honor his country. Upon my first visit to the gallery I looked at the pictures without reference to the catalogue—a good method, I think, for those who would educate their art faculties. I saw the Whistler therefore in the first place without that cold feeling that runs down your bones when you unexpectedly come into the presence of Mightiness. Poor fool that I was, only did I see a "smut," a dirty little daub, representing absolutely nothing. I observed only three straight lines in foreground—I should say, the bottom of the paper, and a little flake white which apparently had been spat upon the "distance." I was tempted to think bad things about the Committee of Selection for allowing fond mammas to send to the exhibition the bits of juvenile genius that may be occasionally found in the sweepings of a nursery. But, bless your life, I didn't know then that it was a Whistler. On my second walk around the ramparts I knew then that this mighty gun was there, and I hesitated to stand in front, knowing it to be loaded to the muzzle. How different the picture seemed: one could almost fancy that one saw right through the "captive impression" the veritable Whistler himself, in his London club, yelling to his brother artists about the "painting of the future." In the serene and placid depths of that blot of burnt umber to the north one can see, as in a dream, Whistler on the witness-stand, striving to educate the bewigged judges in the mysteries of symphonies in old gold and cerulean.

Ah, that's the way to look at one of Whistler's "studies." It won't do to bring to them your obstinate views on common sense, because when there is no grain of sense in them it would be unfair to judge them by such an arbitrary standard. It won't do to glare boldly at the "impression," and cry, "This picture shall rise or fall in my estimation according as it conforms to the great and immutable laws that have ever regulated art," because painting is a representation of something in the heavens above or in the earth beneath, and Whistler's "studies" don't pretend to be either.

The catalogue price of this fifty square inches of vacuity is two hundred and sixty dollars; no doubt "fifty guineas" in Whistler's accompanying letter to the society. If it is sold at his price, a little calculation will show that there will be a surplus of eight dollars over fifty guineas, and I think it would be a good scheme for the Water Color Society to offer Whistler the eight dollars for his autograph—if he'll do it at such a low figure—and present the same to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

THOMAS FROST.

New-York, Feb. 14, 1889.

N. Y. (City). Exhibitions
Whistler

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GILLISS BROTHERS & TURNURE
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L'ENVOIE.

A PICTURE is finished when all trace of the means used to bring about the end has disappeared.

To say of a picture, as is often said in its praise, that it shows great and earnest labour, is to say that it is incomplete and unfit for view.

Industry in Art is a necessity,—not a virtue,—and any evidence of the same, in the production, is a blemish, not a quality;—a proof, not of achievement, but of absolutely insufficient work, for work alone will efface the footsteps of work.

The work of the master reeks not of the sweat of the brow,—suggests no effort,—and is finished from its beginning.

The completed task of perseverance only has never been begun, and will remain unfinished to eternity,—a monument of goodwill and foolishness.

“There is one that laboureth, and taketh pains, and maketh haste, and is so much the more behind.”

The masterpiece should appear as the flower to the painter,—perfect in its bud as in its bloom,—with no reason to explain its presence,—no mission to fulfill,—a joy to the artist,—a delusion to the philanthropist, a puzzle to the botanist, an accident of sentiment and alliteration to the literary man.



Build in Envoies by this Wells in
 scrap-ends 1/24/33



PAINTINGS—DRAWINGS—PASTELS.

1. Caprice in Red. (*Water Colour.*)
2. Grey and Green—near Chenonceau. (*Water Colour.*)
3. Green and Blue—The Fields—Loches. (*Water Colour.*)
4. Green and Silver—Loches. (*Water Colour.*)
5. Grey and Silver—Purflect. (*Water Colour.*)
6. Grey and Silver—Chelsea Embankment. (*Water Colour.*)
7. Yellow and Black. (*Water Colour.*)
8. Grey and Silver—The Beach—Holland. (*Water Colour.*)
9. A Silver Note—Sun and Rain—Holland. (*Water Colour.*)
10. Blue and Gold—Havre. (*Water Colour.*)
11. Grey and Silver—Liverpool. (*Water Colour.*)
12. Grey and Gold—Off Holland. (*Water Colour.*)

13. Grey and Silver—North Sea. (*Water Colour.*)
14. A Pink Note. (*Water Colour.*)
15. Pink and Violet. (*Water Colour.*)
16. Note in Rose and Silver—Dortrecht. (*Water Colour.*)
17. White and Silver—Cremerie—Paris. (*Water Colour.*)
18. Green and Silver—The Three Clouds. (*Water Colour.*)
19. Blue and Violet—The Market—Dieppe. (*Water Colour.*)
20. Grey and Gold—The Beach—Trouville. (*Water Colour.*)
21. Silver and Blue—Southampton. (*Water Colour.*)
22. An Orange Note—Booth's Paris. (*Water Colour.*)
23. Blue and Silver—Holland. (*Water Colour.*)
24. Grey and Green—Cornwall.
25. Arrangement in Black—Reading
26. A Red Note—The Sofa.
27. Grey and Brown—The Sad Sea—Dieppe.
28. A Green Note—The Cliffs, St. Ives—Cornwall.

29. A Grey Note—The Life Boat.
30. Grey and Silver—Hotel Yard—Dieppe.
31. Blue and Green—Dieppe.
32. Blue and Green—Whitstable.
33. A Grey Note—Flags, Portsmouth. (*Water Colour.*)
34. Gold and Brown—Dortrecht. (*Water Colour.*)
35. Grey and Pink—Bank Holiday—Banners. (*Water Colour.*)
36. Grey and Green—Dortrecht. (*Water Colour.*)
37. Rose and Silver. (*Pastel.*)
38. A Red Note—Venice. (*Pastel.*)
39. A Rose Note. (*Pastel.*)
40. A Red Note—A Fête on the Sands—Ostend.
41. Green and White—Dieppe. (*Water Colour.*)
42. Grey Note—A Rainy Day—Dortrecht.
43. Grey and Green—Holland. (*Water Colour.*)
44. Green and Silver—The Photographer. (*Water Colour.*)
45. Gold and Pink. (*Pastel.*)
46. Pink and Violet. (*Pastel.*)
47. Rose and Violet. (*Pastel.*)

48. A Red Note. (*Pastel.*)
49. Blue and Silver. (*Pastel.*)
50. Baby's Head. (*Pencil Drawing.*)
51. Woman and Child. (*Pencil Drawing.*)
52. Resting. (*Pencil Drawing.*)
53. Baby's Head. (*Pencil Drawing.*)
54. Nocturne in Black and Gold—The Tire Wheel.
55. Nocturne in Black and Gold—The Falling Rocket.
56. A Violet Note. (*Pastel.*)
57. Blue and Violet. (*Pastel.*)
58. Flesh Colour and White. (*Pastel.*)
59. Flesh Colour and Red. (*Pastel.*)
60. A Red and Pink Note. (*Pastel.*)
61. A Pink Note. (*Pastel.*)
62. Grey and Flesh Colour—Venice. (*Pastel.*)

THE WHISTLER EXHIBITION AT WUNDERLICH'S. *Abuelo*

There is a little free exhibition at Wunderlich's just now which has a decided interest of curiosity. All the world to-day has heard something of Mr. Whistler, and all the world knows much more about his personality than about his work. He has adopted many of the methods of the comedian, and knows well how, while seemingly scorning the press and covering the critics with contumely, to use both for the greatest possible amount of personal publicity. He has kept himself so well before the public that his witticisms and his eccentricities, his snow-white tuft and his black wand, are perfectly familiar to all of us, and yet until now most of us have known next to nothing of his work. Naturally one is curious to see what the "Nocturnes" and "Arrangements" really are like, and we have now an opportunity to satisfy ourselves.

You go through Mr. Wunderlich's shop, you lift a portière, and you find yourself in a little square, peach-blow-colored room, over the walls of which are scattered, in little flat gold frames, all alike, a quantity of little "Notes" and "Harmonies." There is a little peach-blow vase in one corner and a little light stand with catalogues in another, and that is all. The whole effect is extravagantly simple, and the diffused light and the strange color give one the impression that one is enclosed in the heart of some great pink lotos flower in the bottom of a lake. There is an impressive silence, and one instinctively hushes his voice and walks on tiptoe as in a church. One feels indeed that he is in a church—that he is in the holy-of-holies of a cult. This is the temple of an esoteric worship, and Mr. Whistler is the apostle of high art. One reverently approaches the little stand and picks up the little gray catalogue with the sting-tailed butterfly stamped upon it, and one reads in '*l'Envoie*' (we hope Mr. Whistler is not responsible for this spelling) words like these:

"A picture is finished when all trace of the means used to bring about the end has disappeared.

"Industry in Art is a necessity—not a virtue.

"The work of the master reeks not of the sweat of the brow.

"The completed task of perseverance only has never been begun, and will remain to all eternity—a monument of good-will and foolishness.

"The masterpiece should appear as the flower to the painter—perfect in its bud as in its bloom, with no reason to explain its presence, no mission to fulfil—a joy to the artist, a delusion to the philanthropist, a puzzle to the botanist, an accident of sentiment and alliteration to the literary man."

After these delphic utterances come the titles: "Caprice in Red," "A Silver Note," "Gray and Gold," etc., etc. With a mind properly subdued and impressed by these surroundings and this preface, one turns to the "masterpieces," and one sees—what? Two or three dozen of the slightest of sketches, about the size of your hand, in oil or water-color or pastel.

The best of them are charming in their way—such little notes of things seen in passing as every clever painter makes now and then, and shows only to his artist friends with the remark that "That is a nice little bit of color, isn't it?" or "I think that might be worth painting some day." These are the best, and from them by easy stages one descends to little dabbles of blue and white water-color or thin scratches of pastel on gray paper that look more like the experiments of a gifted child than like even the hastiest notes of a trained artist. Some of them represent, if one may use the word, the nude figure, and their insufficiency is almost absurd. Imagine a piece of coarse brown paper with a badly drawn outline faintly traced upon it, a very little white chalk vaguely rubbed into the lights, and a very little pink chalk scratched over the background, and you have one of Mr. Whistler's "Pink Notes."

It is not worth while to be angry at his

effrontery. Mr. Whistler is merely laughing at the public, and grave criticism, like grave admiration, would throw him into fits of merriment. Let us merely assure him that we understand him and are ready to laugh with him—or at him—as he pleases. There is only one word that fits him, and that is neither English nor French, but *argot*. He is a very talented, a very successful, and a very amusing *blagueur*.

Mr. Whistler's Pictures at the Wunderlich Gallery.

A respected evening contemporary recently damned these little pictures with faint praise, calling them in many cases very charming, but, after all, only "the sort of thing" that every painter does on his summer rambles, and looks upon as mere interesting notes or suggestive schemes for future elaboration. In one sense the words are true, in another sense most untrue. Every painter does this sort of thing, but not every painter in this sort of way. Indeed it would be difficult to find another living artist who in work so slight, in such tiny sketches and simple studies, could give us half so true a report upon the outside world, half so fascinating a report upon the personality of the mind which had surveyed it. Tiny things they are, no one of them more than a few inches across, done in oils, in water color, or in pastel. But there is scarcely one of them, except, indeed, the figure drawings, which is not a triumph of insight and interpretation, while the variety among them is quite marvellous. Here, for instance, in No. 17, we have a sketch of a corner shop in Paris done all in whites, with but a touch of green in two small potted plants beside the door. Nothing could be more luminous, delicate, exquisite, nothing could have been touched with a lighter, more masterly hand. There, in No. 4, we have a wide foreground meadow, with a line of trees and houses in the distance and a broad summer sky. It is much stronger in color, but just as perfect in its way. No. 12 shows a foggy day "Off Holland," with a wonderfully rendered misty atmosphere; No. 19, a market place at Dieppe, with a crowd of most living little figures; No. 16, a glimpse of Dordrecht, with vivid red roofs; No. 22, street booths in Paris, with a bright touch of orange as the key-note; No. 40, a dark gray day on the sands at Ostend with a fête in progress, and strong-colored flags set against the heavy sky; and No. 42, a still darker, duller day in Holland waters, with a most masterly sky, as solid and full of details of form as though, instead of a bit of a water color, it were a big and finished picture in oils. We pass from one to the other, finding something new at every step, and thinking each new thing the best of all. It is impossible to say whether Mr. Whistler does best with green meadows and blue sky, with white houses and thronging figures, with lowering clouds and driving winds, and it is impossible to fancy any one else doing quite so well with either. They are not things to be described in words, these dainty trifles as full of feeling as they are of skill. Their value lies not at all in the subjects which have been painted, but altogether in the way they have been painted. One who knows Whistler's eye and hand, can imagine

them for himself; one who does not must simply go and see them. It would be as easy to describe the tinting of a sea shell as the handiwork of the "Crêmerie in Paris," or to write how a breeze feels as to tell the effect of the "Liverpool."

Of course the exhibition is as Whistlerish in its setting as in the essence of the work it shows. The room is pink throughout, and a pink so very soft and sentimental that we are fain to believe it was invented for the purpose. The catalogue tells us, over the painter's signature, what art is and what it is not. And each picture is described as a "Red Note" or a "Green Note," as "Gray and Silver," "Brown and Gold," or something else which makes the printed page seem to shimmer with color even when the pictures have passed out of sight. Sometimes these little descriptions are exact and very helpful to the memory of Mr. Whistler's arch enemy, the critic; sometimes they are measurably fantastic; and here, perhaps, Mr. Whistler thinks he has got a joke on this same critic. But fate has got a joke on him. It would be bad enough if so superfine a catalogue were marred by a mistake in English, but a mistake in French harrows the very soul of the reverent reader. Can it have been "our James" himself who wrote "*L'Envoi*" with a final *e*? And if not, what fate awaits the transgressor when he shall stand in the presence of the master whom he has so foully betrayed?